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“Culpability and Concealed Motives: An Analysis of the Parties Involved in the Diversion of the Fourth Crusade”

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In the years 1203 and 1204, the Fourth Crusade was diverted from its intended destination of Egypt, first to the Christian city of Zara and then to the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. At both stops, the Crusaders killed fellow Christians and looted the cities. For centuries, this episode has been considered one of history's greatest blunders, the sacking and takeover of one of the largest Christian cities on Earth by an army supposedly dedicated to stamping out the enemies of Christianity. The tendency of recent scholarship regarding the Fourth Crusade has been either to blame or defend an individual, e.g. Boniface of Montferrat, or a faction of the Crusader forces, e.g. the Venetians, for the diversion that resulted in the sack of Constantinople. For example, Alfred Andrea and Ilona Motsiff have written an entire scholarly essay discussing the culpability of Pope Innocent III himself.¹ This article is in direct contrast to an earlier one by Joseph Gill, in which he utilizes primary sources in an attempt to establish Pope Innocent III's lack of responsibility in the outcome of the Crusade.² Instead, Gill places the blame on the Venetians and their Doge, Enrico Dandolo. There has since been a dearth of scholarship in defense of those same Venetians by historians such as Donald E. Queller and Gerald W. Day,³ and Dandolo specifically has been defended in an entire book by historian Thomas Madden.⁴ Queller and Day offer up the secular leader of the Crusade, Boniface of Montferrat, as an alternative to the Venetians in their article. Little or no scholarly work has attempted to clear Boniface of responsibility for the diversion. Indeed, relatively recent and compelling works completed by Michael Angold⁵ and Jonathan Harris⁶ explore the many negative political

¹ Andrea, A.J., and Ilona Motsiff, 'Pope Innocent III and the Diversion of the Fourth Crusade Army to Zara' in Byzantinoslavica 33 (1972). 6-25.

² Gill, Joseph, 'Franks, Venetians, and Pope Innocent III 1201-1203' in Studi Veneziani 12 (1970). 85-106.

³ Queller, Donald E., and Gerald W. Day. 'Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade' in The American Historical Review, Vol. 81, No. 4 (1976). 441-465.

⁴ Madden, Thomas. Enrico Dandolo and the Rise of Venice (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

⁵ Angold, Michael. The Byzantine Empire: A Political History, 1025-1204 (New York: Addison, Wesley, Longman Inc., 1997).

⁶ Harris, Jonathan. Byzantium and the Crusades (New York: Hambledon and London, 2003).

dealings that the Byzantine Empire had with previous Crusaders, including the brothers of Boniface, Renier and Conrad of Montferrat. Though not the purpose of their works, Angold and Harris provide evidence that Boniface had ulterior motives for wanting to go to Constantinople even before the opportunity arose, and that blame for the diversion should be placed with him.

Yet, it is the contention of this essay that this tendency of modern historians to level culpability at a single faction or individual is misguided. By attempting to assign complete blame or to defend wholly one of these groups or individuals, modern historians miss the fact that each of the primary figures is in fact culpable at least peripherally for the disaster that ultimately ensued. More importantly, however, by assigning or deflecting blame they ignore the actual cause of the diversion: central players, namely Boniface of Montferrat and the Venetians under Doge Enrico Dandolo, possessed animosity towards Constantinople and knowledge of the wishes of the Byzantine Prince Alexius even prior to the outset of the Crusade. Analysis of the few available primary sources that have been utilized for modern scholarship exposes these ulterior motives, while at the same time revealing that many central figures are clearly less responsible. This essay then, illustrates why the focus in study of the diversion of the Fourth Crusade must rest on the concealed agendas of only a minority of the key individuals, while simultaneously demonstrating the futility of attempting to place blame on those who embarked on the Crusade without underhanded motives.

Before beginning this task, discussion and analysis of the historiography of the primary sources relied upon by modern historians is essential. In the case of the historians mentioned earlier, there are four main primary sources that they have utilized, though it must be stated that other, more concise works such as the *Devastatio Consantinopolitana* have also been used. The first of the main primary sources utilized in recent scholarship is the *Gesta Innocentii Tertii*,

composed by an anonymous author between roughly 1204 and 1209. Translated to English, the title means “The Deeds of Innocent III” and the work is a biography dealing with events that occurred during his papacy, including his relationship with key figures involved in the Fourth Crusade. The strength of this work lies in its use of the actual letters of Innocent in his attempts to guide his religious subjects. However, total reliance on this work as wholly truthful would be a mistake. It is blatantly positive regarding all aspects of Innocent III’s life, as well as the period in which he ruled over the Papal See. Nevertheless, nothing in the section regarding Innocent’s dealings with the Crusaders, the Venetians, or Byzantium explicitly shows him to be responsible for the diversion or to possess an ulterior motive for issuing the call for the Fourth Crusade. The modern translation of this work utilized in this essay was completed by James M. Powell in 2004.⁷

The second heavily utilized primary source regarding the Fourth Crusade was written circa 1215 by Gunther, a monk at the monastery of Pairis, in defense of the actions of his abbot Martin who accompanied the armies of the Fourth Crusade. Like the *Gesta Innocentii Tertii*, this work by Gunther is heavily biased since its principle purpose is to protect the reputation of his abbot, who following the sack of Constantinople looted a mass of valuable religious relics from the cathedrals and churches of the city and had them transported to his monastery, which at that time was in Alstace. Ironically, another of its main purposes is to catalogue many of those same relics, as well as to rather tediously categorize the sack of Constantinople as a part of God’s plan for humanity. Due to this biased purpose, as well as to the questionable veracity of many of the details in Gunther’s work, the *Hystoria Constantinopolitana* itself will not be specifically utilized in this essay, though articles discussed have made use of it.

⁷ Powell, James M. The Deeds of Pope Innocent III by an Anonymous Author (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

This will not be the case with Geoffrey de Villehardouin's *De la Conquete de Constantinople*, or "On the Conquest of Constantinople," which has been heavily relied upon by recent historians, especially those who attempt to defend the actions of the Venetians. Again, a modern translation, done in 1908 by Frank T. Marzials, has been used for purposes of this essay⁸. The original was written circa 1210 by Villehardouin, who at the beginning of the Crusade held the title of Marshal of Champagne. This work's value lies in the fact that he was one of the principle nobles involved in both the planning and the direction of the Fourth Crusade. It is a narrative of the entirety of the enterprise, from the call for the Crusade by Pope Innocent III, to the embassy to the Venetians for negotiating transport (of which Geoffrey was a member), and finally to the sack of Constantinople and subsequent division of Byzantine holdings by the Western nobles. The fact that Geoffrey was privy to the most confidential of councils among the upper echelon leaders of the Crusade, as well as to the exact details of the original negotiations with the Venetians, is the chief strength of this work. However, since it was the overestimation of the original embassy to Venice regarding the expected size of the Crusading forces that led to their inability to pay, Geoffrey's narrative is at times defensive and filled with justification and suppression of various facts that do not coincide with his view of things. It is also violently angry towards Crusaders who embarked from ports other than Venice, a tedious early theme of the work. Moreover, Geoffrey is also blatantly biased in a positive manner towards both Boniface of Montferrat and the Venetian Doge Enrico Dandolo, despite negative portrayals of them by other primary source writers, namely Robert of Clari.

His work, *La Conquete de Constantinople*, is also a narrative of the entirety of the Fourth Crusade. Robert of Clari, a lower level knight and participant, dictated it to an unknown scribe

⁸ Villehardouin, Geoffrey de. *De la Conquete de Constantinople*. Translated by Frank T. Marzials. Found on <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/villehardouin.html>. Accessed 28 January, 2007.

in 1216. It is his low social standing that makes Robert's work so potentially valuable, and so rare. In contrast to Geoffrey, he lacked access to the councils of the leaders, and to the direction that the Crusade was to ultimately follow. He did, however, have knowledge of the feelings and words of the common soldiers and knights that followed the path to Constantinople, and his narrative reflects this. Unlike Villehardouin, Robert of Clari had no agenda in writing his narrative, which is thus a refreshingly unbiased view of the actions and events of the Fourth Crusade. The only potential problems with Robert's work are the potential accuracy of the unknown writer to whom Robert dictated, and a seeming dislike of Boniface of Montferrat, which is obvious throughout. There is also a possibility that Robert was familiar with the account written by Villehardouin only a few years earlier. The translation of *La Conquete de Constantinople* utilized by this essay was completed in 1936 by Edgar H. McNeal.⁹

Prior to effectively discussing a topic such as this, it is also vital to provide a narrative of the known *facts* regarding the primary events of the Fourth Crusade. In August of 1198, Pope Innocent III proclaimed the Crusade, after hearing of the successful preaching for it done by a Priest named Fulk of Neuilly.¹⁰ During the following two years, many of the most powerful nobles of France pledged themselves to the enterprise, including Count Thibault of Champagne, who was elected as the secular head of the Crusade in 1200. Late that same year, Thibault and two other powerful nobles, Baldwin of Flanders and Louis of Blois, each appointed two members to an embassy whose mission was to negotiate with the Venetians for passage for the entirety of the Crusader army. Among the members of this embassy was Geoffrey of Villehardouin, Marshal of Champagne. However, while they were away, Thibault of

⁹ McNeal, Edgar H. The Conquest of Constantinople (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

¹⁰ Villehardouin, 1.

Champagne died and Boniface, the Marquis of Montferrat, was appointed the secular head of the Crusade directly thereafter.¹¹

Nevertheless, the embassy to Venice was thought at its conclusion to be a major success. The terms of the agreement are described by Villehardouin as follows, in the words of Venetian Doge Enrico Dandolo:

We will build transports to carry four thousand five hundred horses, and nine thousand squires, and ships for four thousand five hundred knights, and twenty thousand sergeants of foot. And we will agree also to purvey food for these horses and people during nine months. This is what we undertake to do at the least, on condition that you pay us for each horse four marks, and for each man two marks. And the covenants we are now explaining to you, we undertake to keep, weresoever we may be, for a year, reckoning from the day on which we sail from the port of Venice in the service of God and of Christendom. Now the sum total of the expenses above named amounts to 85,000 marks.¹²

The embassy agreed to these conditions of the Doge, 85,000 silver marks for passage and the upkeep of 33,500 troops and 4,500 horses and their squires. Its members then returned to France and advised their respective Counts of the success of the venture.

The Crusaders began gathering in Venice during the summer of 1202, at which point the overestimation of their embassy became apparent. Though they waited until months after the scheduled departure, the forces arriving amounted to less than half of the 33,500 that were originally expected. Robert of Clari estimates that the Crusading leaders were short of the 85,000 marks by some 36,000.¹³ Nevertheless, the Doge demanded payment, and when it became clear that full payment was not forthcoming, he offered to allow the Crusaders to pay their debt by assisting the Venetians to conquer the Christian city of Zara.¹⁴ Following the

¹¹ McNeal, 34-35.

¹² Villehardouin, 6.

¹³ McNeal, 41.

¹⁴ Villehardouin, 16.

agreement of the Crusaders, Dandolo and many of the Venetians reportedly took the Cross themselves.¹⁵

The combined forces of the Crusading army and Venetians set sail for Zara in October of 1202. They began the siege of the city November 11th, although a large contingent of the army objected to the attack, and some nobles such as Simon de Montfort refused altogether and set sail independently for the Holy Land. Despite an attempt by the citizens to surrender, as well as a letter from Pope Innocent III threatening excommunication, the city fell on November 24th. The Crusading army then sent an embassy to Rome to request absolution from the Pope, which was granted to the Crusaders, but not to Dandolo and his Venetians.¹⁶

A month after the fall of Zara, envoys arrived there from Germany to plead the case of the outcast Byzantine Prince, Alexius Angelus, who wanted the Crusaders to assist him in regaining the Byzantine throne.¹⁷ Though yet another large contingent objected to this second diversion, and again many left the army to depart from other ports, the offer of aid from Alexius convinced the bulk of the army's commanders, as well as the Venetians, to go to Constantinople. Alexius' offer is described by Villehardouin, in the words of the envoys:

And first, if God grant that you restore him to his inheritance, he will place the whole empire of Roumania in obedience to Rome, from which it has long been separated. Further...he will give you 200,000 marks of silver, and food for all those of the host...and all the days of his life he will maintain, at his own charges, five hundred knights in the land overseas [the Holy Land] to guard that land.¹⁸

Those who accepted this offer then gathered together, and the fleet sailed, arriving at Corfu, which was used as a staging area.

¹⁵ Villehardouin, 17.

¹⁶ Powell, 142-145.

¹⁷ Villehardouin, 22.

¹⁸ Villehardouin, 23.

Following the arrival of Alexius, the Crusading army set sail for Constantinople from Corfu on May 26th, 1203. After an unsuccessful attempt to obtain the surrender of Constantinople by parading the young Alexius around the sea walls of the city, the Crusader army laid siege to the city following several days of preparation.¹⁹ They succeeded in taking Constantinople on July 17th, when the Emperor Alexius III, despite overwhelming numerical superiority, refused to attack. He fled the city that evening with a large amount of treasure and several of his people.²⁰ The young Alexius was crowned as Emperor on August 1st.

The Crusaders then spent several months in Constantinople, during which time it became apparent that their young Alexius IV was unable to pay them the agreed upon amount, and unwilling to honor the other provisions that he had promised. However, before this matter escalated, Alexius IV was murdered in late March of 1204 by Alexius Murzuphlus, who then took the title of Emperor for himself.²¹ In response, the Crusader army and the Venetian fleet once again laid siege to the city, which fell to their combined forces on April 12, 1204. Great portions of the city were burned during the battle.²²

In the aftermath, the wealth of the city of Constantinople was divided up by the Crusaders, and precious relics were looted and transported West by Martin, the abbot of Alstace, and by other Bishops who had accompanied the army. Baldwin of Flanders was elected as the new Emperor of Latin Byzantium, and he and the other nobles set about subduing the surrounding regions. The army of the Fourth Crusade made no further attempt to journey to the Holy Land.

With both this historical basis and the discussion of the primary sources achieved, it is possible to begin illustrating the importance of the motives that ultimately resulted in diverting

¹⁹ Villehardouin, 35-36.

²⁰ McNeal, 77.

²¹ McNeal, 85.

²² Villehardouin, 64.

the Crusade to the capital of Byzantium. It is fitting to open this discussion with the secular leader whose name arises most often in perpetrating dishonest actions against his fellow Crusaders: Boniface, Marquis of Montferrat and secular head of the Crusade. It is best to begin here, first because of his position of power over the other secular leaders, but more importantly because of history's knowledge of his antagonism towards Constantinople even prior to the gathering of the Crusaders at Venice during the summer of 1202.

This antagonism occurred due to the fate of Boniface's brothers, who were both intimately involved in affairs in Constantinople prior to the Fourth Crusade. His elder brother Renier married the daughter of Emperor Manuel I in 1180, and was supposedly granted the city of Thessalonica as a fief. However, he was killed in the aftermath of the usurpation of the throne by Andronicus, and Thessalonica was given to someone of a different family.²³ Boniface's brother Conrad had suffered even worse fortune during his short period of contact with Byzantine royalty. Conrad was the brother-in-law of Isaac II Angelos, having married Isaac's sister Theodora in 1187. That year he saved Isaac from an attempt to seize his throne by one Alexius Branas.²⁴ Robert of Clari relates this story in his narrative, and describes how Isaac had agreed to assist in the battle, but instead closed the gates after Conrad and his troops had ridden out to confront Branas. He further records that after Conrad confronted the Emperor with this, that Isaac made plans to have him assassinated to hide the evidence of his cowardice.²⁵ Conrad later left for the Holy Land, and died there in 1192, never having been rewarded for his service. Though Harris points out that the Crusaders actually had Conrad's foe Isaac freed after the first takeover of the city in 1204, both the negative history that Boniface's family had with the emperors of Constantinople and the fact that he demanded Thessalonica as a reward following

²³ Harris, 151-152.

²⁴ Angold, 304.

²⁵ McNeal, 60-61.

the takeover of the city lend credence to Boniface having an ulterior motive for diverting the Fourth Crusade.

This idea is further strengthened by the period following the escape of young prince Alexius from captivity in Constantinople, and his journey to the land of Boniface's brother-in-law, Philip of Hohenstaufen (also called Swabia). Boniface was a vassal of Phillip, who prevailed upon him to "...give support to the young Greek prince..."²⁶ After unsuccessfully attempting to garner support from the Pope, Alexius arrived in Verona, probably in early 1202, and it was from there that he communicated with Montferrat and other leaders of the upcoming Crusade, and won their sympathy. It is here that Boniface became personally involved, as described by Joseph Gill in the following passage:

The *Gesta* record that Montferrat visited Philip of Swabia and later also the Pope. With Philip he almost certainly treated of the case of Alexius. To the Pope he hinted at the project but went no further when he saw Innocent's opposition. Precisely when these various events occurred cannot be decided with certainty, but at the latest by autumn 1202, for by then Alexius III, Emperor of Constantinople (and uncle of the young Prince Alexius), had heard of what was being proposed and had sent an embassy with a letter to the Pope asking him to prevent it.²⁷

This evidence points to two facts that are interesting in the discussion of Boniface's role in the diversion of the Crusade, if not to Zara, then at least to Constantinople. The first of these is that this is further proof that before the Crusade ever had any financial difficulty with the Venetians the elected head of the enterprise was already in favor of the cause of young Alexius. The second is that Boniface, even previous to the excommunication of his troops at Zara, was already aware that the Pope was against any diversion of his Crusade that would result in the bloodshed of fellow Christians. Coupled together, these facts emphasize compelling points about Boniface: first, his knowledge of the Innocent's position negates any possibility that his intention in taking

²⁶ Andrea and Motsiff, 13.

²⁷ Gill, 87.

the Cross was inspired by religion, since he proceeded to divert the Crusade anyway; and second, his support of the cause of Alexius in the face of that same position indicates that his ulterior motives against Constantinople were certainly paramount in his acceptance of the position as secular head of the Crusade.

However, judgment need not rest on the connivances of Boniface that occurred prior to the Crusade, because he also made several questionable decisions well into it. For example, there is evidence that Innocent intended that his first letter prohibiting the diversion to Zara was to be read to the assembled crusading host at Venice, by the Cistercian abbot of Locedio. However, "...Guy, abbot of Vaux, was the man who made this letter known to the crusaders while they were encamped before the very walls of Zara."²⁸ The reason for the transfer of this letter and the lateness of its reading occurred is only speculation, but there is ample evidence to support the contention that Boniface, perhaps in concert with the Venetians, prohibited it from being read to the troops and lesser knights. First and foremost, as previously stated, Boniface knew that the pope was against any diversion of the army into Christian lands. Perhaps even more compelling, however, is that the abbot of Locedio was a member of Montferrat's retinue, whereas Guy was a member of Simon de Montfort's.²⁹ Finally, it is known of Boniface from a letter he wrote to the Pope following the fall of Zara, "...that in spite of strict injunctions to the contrary, he had held back a papal sentence of excommunication addressed to the Venetians..."³⁰ Taken in concert, these facts make it seem inevitable that it was Boniface who prohibited the letter from being read, in defiance of the Pope's wishes.

A final example illustrating the motives of Boniface is that after the Crusading fleet arrived at Corfu near the first of May, 1203, Boniface himself did not arrive until several days later, and

²⁸ Andrea and Motsiff, 17.

²⁹ Andrea and Motsiff, 18.

³⁰ Gill, 94.

then in the company of prince Alexius.³¹ At this point, "...more than half the host refused to follow the leadership of the marquis of Montferrat, the counts of Flanders, Blois, and Saint-Pol, and others of the pro-Alexian faction."³² Those who were opposed to the diversion to Constantinople set up their camp away from the others in a valley, intending instead to send word to Walter of Brienne that they were prepared to serve under him. "Boniface of Montferrat urged those who wished to go to Constantinople to go to the camp of the dissidents, and to beg them humbly, for God's sake, to have pity on the army and not to dishonor themselves by being responsible for the failure of the crusade."³³ This was done, and the dissidents agreed to go to Constantinople for no more than a month, unless they agreed otherwise. They also insisted that it be guaranteed publicly that they would have ships for transportation to the Holy Land provided within fifteen days of their being requested, and these public guarantees were given.³⁴ Boniface is therefore guilty of convincing his fellow nobles, who were for all intents and purposes on the Crusade for their salvation, to accompany him to a siege on a major Christian city.

Therefore, in evaluating the role of Boniface it can be said that prior to the Crusade he was already in support of prince Alexius' plan to regain his throne in Constantinople. This was due to the possibility of reprisal for the previous wrongs done to his brothers, and despite his knowledge of the disapproval of the Pope regarding the venture. It is also probable that he suppressed a letter from the Pope to the army encamped at Venice that contained the ban of excommunication on anyone involved in attacking the Christian city of Zara, until it found its way into the hands of a Cistercian monk who was not of his retinue. Finally, he convinced fellow nobles who were against the venture to Constantinople that they should undertake the

³¹ Queller, Donald E., Thomas K. Compton and Donald C. Campbell. 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority' in *Speculum* Vol. 49, No. 3. (1974). 458.

³² Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 459.

³³ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 459.

³⁴ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 459.

journey with the young prince Alexius, again to attack a Christian city, and again despite the disapproval of the Pope. This tremendous amount of evidence demonstrates beyond any doubt that Boniface of Montferrat possessed ulterior motives for leading the Fourth Crusade, and that these motives were among the chief causes of the diversion that ultimately ensued.

However, Boniface cannot be labeled as the only chief participant in the Fourth Crusade who held pre-existing motives to divert the Crusade to Constantinople. The same must be said of the greedy Venetians and their Doge Enrico Dandolo, though an attempt has been made by Donald Queller and Gerald Day to defend the Venetians as a group, while another has been made by Thomas Madden to defend Dandolo specifically. Queller and Day begin by listing the long tradition that the Venetians held in aiding previous Crusades, an argument that culminates with the Doge and many of his subjects taking the cross themselves.³⁵ Frankly, this argument is ineffective, simply because it does not take into account these same Venetians refusing to recognize the papal legate Peter Capuano as anything more than a simple cleric.³⁶ It also refuses to take into account that the Venetians ignored the papal ban of excommunication placed on them before Zara, which they then destroyed, as well as the fact that they only made an attempt to be absolved from that excommunication after the fall of Constantinople. (It is interesting to note that this attempt was a petition to Capuano to perform the absolution).³⁷ That the Venetians knew full well that their attacks on both Zara and Constantinople were done contrary to the Pope's wishes demonstrates that their motive for undertaking the Crusade, like that of Boniface, had nothing to do with religion or their salvation.

³⁵ Queller and Day, 'Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade', 718-720.

³⁶ Andrea and Motsiff, 12.

³⁷ Gill, 95.

Analysis of their motives for the venture can go much deeper than this, however. Queller and Day assert that after Dandolo discovered that the crusaders were unable to pay, “The crusaders were gathered on the island of San Nicolo di Lido in a sort of limbo...”³⁸ They also write:

The doge spoke to the crusaders assembled in Venice, stressing his city’s prodigious commitment, and he threatened to cut off their supplies unless they paid up. Rather than being part of an overall plan to force the crusaders to submit to Venetian direction, Dandolo’s threat represents simply the angry reaction of a man who saw his city’s efforts and investment perishing for nothing.³⁹

Once again, this argument does not take into account much of the primary source evidence.

The *Devastatio Constantinopolitana* records that in Lombardy no more than one night’s hospitality was permitted for crusaders and that it was forbidden to sell them provisions. In Venice they were lodged in tents on St. Nicholas’ island from 1 June till 1 October, whence it was forbidden to move them and they were treated as captives. Nonetheless many returned home, many managed to get to Apulia, and among those remaining disease broke out ‘so that the living could scarce bury the dead’.⁴⁰

With such accounts existing, it is evident that the Venetians were using wretched conditions as a bargaining tool to divert the crusaders to Zara. Even if this is not the case, the fact remains that they subjected the crusaders to horrible conditions when they discovered their inability to pay the asking price of the treaty.

Queller and Day go on to state, “Zara was not intended, however, as a substitution for the crusading goal, but as an excursion on the way.”⁴¹ They then attempt to show the economic benefits that the Venetians would reap from the intended journey to Alexandria, and how “...Dandolo was correct in his assertion that the voyage to Egypt so late in the year was impractical.”⁴² Again they are guilty of ignoring aspects of the available historical evidence. They do not attempt to address the impracticality of Zara as a target for a Christian crusade. In

³⁸ Queller and Day, ‘Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade’, 726.

³⁹ Queller and Day, ‘Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade’, 726.

⁴⁰ Gill, 88.

⁴¹ Queller and Day, ‘Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade’, 727.

⁴² Queller and Day, ‘Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade’, 728.

fact, Zara "...was a possession of the King of Hungary, who had taken the Cross himself and whose property was therefore under the protection of the Church and the Pope."⁴³ Therefore, it seems evident that they would have known that even suggesting Zara as a diversion was against the whole Crusading ideal. This in turn makes it evident that their motive in choosing Zara as a target was due to the economic gain that they would incur and to the strong interest they had in the reconquest of the city, which even Queller and Day admit.⁴⁴

When examining the motives of the Venetians during the Fourth Crusade, it is also necessary to examine the specific actions of the Doge Enrico Dandolo. Besides holding the Crusaders in captivity near Venice and thereafter convincing them to divert their Christian Crusade against a target that belonged to someone who had also taken the Cross, Dandolo's actions at Zara and later must be examined. Ironically it is Donald E. Queller, along with Thomas K. Compton and Donald A. Campbell, who provide information on this subject. They write that following the announcement by Abbot Guy of Vaux-de-Cernay that the attack was prohibited in the name of the Pope, the doge "...angrily retorted that he would not give up his revenge upon Zara, excommunicated or not. Again he demanded that the crusaders keep their word, and the 'barons all answered that they would gladly help him..."⁴⁵ This points to the doge having a personal agenda for the attack on Zara, since under no circumstances would he allow it to be called off. It also makes it confusing that Queller would later write a paper defending the doge and his Venetians on account of their religious commitment.

Nevertheless, Queller and his fellow writers do list evidence of Dandolo's personal involvement in both the diversion to Constantinople and during the attack that ultimately prevailed over the great city. However, a recent attempt to defend Dandolo has been written by

⁴³ Gill, 89.

⁴⁴ Queller and Day, 'Some Arguments in Defense of the Venetians on the Fourth Crusade', 727.

⁴⁵ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 450-451.

Queller protégé Thomas Madden, and attempts to illustrate the complete innocence of Dandolo in the diversion from Zara to Constantinople. Madden writes:

Historians have wrongly tended to see Enrico Dandolo as the main proponent of the German proposal (to divert the Crusade to Constantinople). From the beginning, this was the project of Boniface of Montferrat and a few French leaders. It is possible that Dandolo knew something of the secret negotiations between the barons and the German court, although there is no evidence for it. It is equally likely that the barons decided to keep the matter to themselves, just as they had kept it from their own people.⁴⁶

However, Madden, within the next page of his book, provides evidence as to why the Doge was in all probability a strong proponent of the plan from the beginning:

It was...true that Alexius III had in turn favored the Pisans and the Genoese, something that had hurt Venetian business in the empire. The installation of a new emperor who owed his position to Venice would undeniably be a boon to the merchants of [Venice] and a blow to their rivals.⁴⁷

Moreover, Madden provides further evidence that Dandolo was probably aware of the plan to divert the Crusade when attempting to explain why the doge decided to “accompany” the Crusaders to Constantinople: “Perhaps the doge had intelligence from Constantinople that confirmed Alexius III’s weak position.”⁴⁸ If the doge was privy to this type of intelligence from a country that was at best a lukewarm trading partner at the time, it is extremely likely that he would have heard of the plan. The knowledge would have come to him either in his many dealings with the Crusading leaders during their extended stay in Venice, or from a source in Constantinople used for the purpose of intelligence gathering.

Whatever his position at Zara, Madden’s mentor and his associates make clear the position of Dandolo without a doubt when they write that he arrived at Corfu, the Crusader Army’s staging area, accompanied by the marquis of Montferrat and the young prince Alexius, in late May of

⁴⁶ Madden, Thomas. *Enrico Dandolo and the Rise of Venice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). 147.

⁴⁷ Madden, 148.

⁴⁸ Madden, 149.

1203.⁴⁹ His arrival with these two key participants makes credible the assumption that Dandolo was by then definitely privy to the attempt to divert the crusade to Constantinople in order to depose Alexius III and place his nephew on the throne. What is more, it is clear that by this point he was a strong proponent of the plan and one of its seminal leaders. This idea is further strengthened when Queller and his associates write that following the success of this venture, and the subsequent deposing and assassination of young Alexius, that "...the Latins unsuccessfully assaulted Constantinople on Friday, 9 April 1204...Shortly after their retreat to the northern side of the harbor, the barons and the doge gathered in a church to determine what should be done."⁵⁰ It is clear that by this point Dandolo had become a major player in the attempted overthrow of the regime in Constantinople, and was invested in the success of the venture. Queller and the others strengthen this assertion when they supply evidence that it was on the advice of the doge that the next attack succeeded. They write, "The advice of the doge, that they again attack the walls facing the harbor, prevailed, however, and on Monday they penetrated the fortifications: Constantinople fell to the crusaders on that day, 12 April 1204."⁵¹

When this balance of evidence is viewed in concert, it is apparent that even prior to the Crusading army being unable to pay, Dandolo was motivated to attack Zara. Like his fellow Venetians, his motives were clearly not religious, since he would not call off the attack even when threatened with excommunication. That being the case, it is safe to state that his later promotion of the diversion to Constantinople on behalf of the young Alexius was similarly contradictory to the Crusading ideal. The regime in power in Constantinople at the time was granting favorable status to Venice's chief competitors. Assuming that his reasons for

⁴⁹ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 458.

⁵⁰ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 461.

⁵¹ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 462.

supporting the young outcast Alexius were anything other than economically motivated would be pure fallacy.

However, the motives of other chief leaders in the Crusading army are not so clear. A large portion of the nobles who found themselves accountable to the Venetians later perpetrated actions that directly resulted in the intended target of the Crusade being changed first to Zara, and later to Constantinople. Their difficulties, however, began with the treaty the envoys had signed with the Venetians in 1201. "Only the counts of Flanders, Champagne, and Blois had been bound directly by the terms of the Treaty of Venice, although there is some evidence of ratification by a larger group at Corbie...The emissaries of the crusaders or their principals had erred tragically in contracting with the Venetians for the transportation of 33,500 crusaders."⁵² The debt of these leaders, estimated by Geoffrey Villehardouin, the marshal of Champagne, to be more than half of the 85,000 marks owed, crippled their options. Thus when the Venetians suggested the excursion to Zara as a way to defer their loans, the plan "...was kept secret among the chief men..."⁵³

Although word of the plan leaked out and caused great discontent, the fleet did go to Zara. Despite the Abbot of Vaux forbidding the assault in the name of the Pope, the barons "...decided to honour their pledge to the Doge. Some six or seven days later the city fell and was divided between the Venetians and French."⁵⁴ The fact that the attack was made, even with the presence of "...apostolic letters forbidding the attack under pain of excommunication," goes to show that secular leaders of the Crusade contributed highly to the fall of Zara.

Furthermore, both secular and religious leaders were guilty of diverting the Crusade to Constantinople after prince Alexius arrived at Corfu and began negotiating on behalf of his plan

⁵² Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 445.

⁵³ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 446-448.

⁵⁴ Gill, 91.

to depose his uncle, the current Byzantine Emperor. The following passage describes the thinking of such leaders, as they argued with the contingent led by Simon of Montfort that was opposed to the proposal to go to Constantinople instead of to the Holy Land:

The opposing party responded that they could accomplish nothing in Syria, for it could be recovered only by going to Egypt or Greece. Simon, abbot of Loos, a follower of Baldwin of Flanders, earnestly prayed the host to hold together and to accept the proposal of the envoys. His pleas and the influence of the greater men finally brought about [the proposal's] adoption, although only twelve of the chief men would affix their signatures to the convention.⁵⁵

With this argument and the previous examples of the complicity of many of the noble leaders of the Crusade, their guilt in going along with the diversion is established. They first signed a treaty that secretly was heading to Egypt rather than Syria, and when its' conditions could not be met, they agreed secretly with the Venetians to the excursion to Zara. Once there, they ignored the threats of the Pope and sacked the city. Finally, at Corfu, both the religious and secular contingents of leadership attempted to convince the entire army to divert again to Constantinople, and as was previously mentioned, they were later successful in doing so at the behest of Boniface of Montferrat. It also must be taken into account that the above-mentioned Baldwin of Flanders, one of the original signers of the Treaty of Venice, later became Emperor of Constantinople after the sack of the city in 1204.⁵⁶

However, though their guilt in the attacks against Zara and Constantinople is clear, it cannot be proven that it was their original intent to lay siege to those cities. It is quite possible that their early intentions were entirely honorable, but when faced with a difficult situation, they deferred to those in greater positions of power. Thus, simply assigning culpability to these Crusading leaders for their actions does nothing to explain the diversion, since it cannot be proven that they were not merely responding, albeit wrongly, to an unforeseen set of circumstances.

⁵⁵ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 452.

⁵⁶ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 463.

Scholarly attempts to lay absolute blame for the diversion at the feet of Pope Innocent III are equally futile. In view of the balance of historical evidence contained in the *Gesta Innocenti III*, including Innocent's remaining letters, and by the writings of men such as Robert of Clari, Gunther of Pairis, and even Geoffrey Villehardouin, there is no reason to believe that Pope Innocent III desired the ultimately disastrous outcome of the Fourth Crusade. Nevertheless, as with all parties involved, Pope Innocent III is not entirely blameless for the diversion, shown primarily by one instance prior to the crusaders gathering at Venice, and later in two mistakes he made in dealing with the crusading leaders during their time in both Venice and in Zara.

The mistake Innocent made prior to gathering at Venice was that he was using troops already committed to embarking on the Crusade for papal warfare in Italy. At this time, Innocent was engaged in a war, "...with the party of the Hohenstaufen for control of Italy and Sicily, which was going badly for the pontiff."⁵⁷ To turn the tide of this affair, Walter, the Count of Brienne had been enlisted by Innocent in the spring of 1201 to take his troops to Apulia and engage the Germans there. Both expected "...that their battles there would be swiftly won and that the crusaders under the count of Brienne would indeed be ready within a year to fulfill their vow."⁵⁸ Unfortunately, things did not turn out this way, and Walter's struggles in Apulia went on for a further four years until his death in 1205, long after the Fourth Crusade had left from Venice.⁵⁹ The result of using such troops for this warfare rather than for the crusade that they were pledged to was that it lessened the number of crusaders who arrived in Venice on the agreed upon date in 1202. This in turn resulted in the crusaders being unable to pay the amount that they had agreed on, 85,000 marks for an estimated 33,500 men and 4,500 horses. Since each man was expected

⁵⁷ Queller, Donald E., Thomas K. Compton, and Donald A. Campbell, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority' in *Speculum* 49 (1974), 442.

⁵⁸ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 443.

⁵⁹ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 443.

to pay his own way, Innocent's actions in diverting men like Walter of Brienne meant that the remaining Crusaders were unable to pay the amount demanded by the Venetians. Although this was certainly a blunder on his part, there is no evidence to show that he intentionally weakened the position of the Crusaders at Venice, and in fact, all evidence points to the contrary. However, this was only the beginning of a series of personal errors in judgment, with a further two mistakes remaining in his dealings with the Crusaders, both at Venice and later at Zara.

The first of these arose from communication he had had with Emperor Alexius III, following activities in France during the summer of 1201, by his nephew, Alexius IV, as well as a visit from the nephew to Pope Innocent himself. The Emperor's concern was that Innocent might support his young nephew in an attempt to remove him from the throne, and his letter to Innocent asked that he prevent the conspiracy. Joseph Gill takes the position that, "Innocent's reply, dated 16 November 1202, was reassuring."⁶⁰ A.J. Andrea and Ilona Motsiff, however, take a far different view, writing, "The papal letter was a very sly attempt at blackmail. Innocent hoped to convince an obviously frightened Alexius III was that his only hope lay in his subordinating the Greek Church to the Roman papacy and in joining the crusade against Islam."⁶¹ The end result of this attempt to blackmail the Byzantine emperor was that Innocent failed to mention in either of his letters to the Crusaders after the fall of Zara that Constantinople specifically was not to be attacked. This points to the idea "...that the pope did not wish to make public at this precise moment any explicit prohibition of the Byzantine adventure since he wished to keep alive the possibility of using this threatened diversion to blackmail Alexius III."⁶² Therefore, this mistake is one of omission and lack of judgment rather than direct involvement. The two letters in no way sanctioned the diversion to Constantinople, and the first had already "threatened the

⁶⁰ Gill, 87.

⁶¹ Andrea and Motsiff, 13.

⁶² Andrea and Motsiff, 17.

crusaders with the most terrible punishment of excommunication should they attack that Christian city (Zara).”⁶³ However, these letters reflect Innocent’s final personal failure during the years of the Fourth Crusade, his excessive pride.

That hubris is shown most by Innocent’s belief that the French nobility leading the crusading army would honor his papal mandates. In truth, many did, but he seemed to believe that they would all honor his past decisions, simply because of the office he held. He felt that he did not have to specifically name Constantinople because he “...had already personally turned down Alexius the Younger and had expressly discouraged Boniface de Montferrat’s personal overture in the name of this young man.”⁶⁴ Thus, he felt that he had already made his opinion on the subject known, and that it would thus be honored by those most responsible for the army’s welfare. Again, this is only a mistake in that Innocent had a personal failing; he felt that although he was miles away, his commands would be obeyed despite any coercion from the Venetians or anyone else.

Despite these personal errors, there is no indication that Innocent III had any intent or motivation for the Fourth Crusade to divert their course to Constantinople. Although he lifted the excommunication placed on the French nobles for their attack on Zara, they had to satisfy a number of conditions for absolution, including “restor[ing] all their spoils to the king of Hungary,”⁶⁵ to whom the city of Zara belonged. Furthermore, in letters issued to the crusading leaders dated 20 June 1203, he wrote:

Indeed, no matter what evil in this and other things the Emperor and those subject to his jurisdiction have committed, it is not for you to pass judgment on their crimes; you did not take on yourselves the symbol of the Cross to avenge this injury, but rather the shame done to the Crucified to whose honour you have dedicated yourselves in a special way...We want you to bear in mind and We warn you not even venially to contravene the

⁶³ Andrea and Motsiff, 16.

⁶⁴ Andrea and Motsiff, 16.

⁶⁵ Andrea and Motsiff, 19.

sense of our prohibition by which We forbade you under pain of excommunication to attempt to invade or harm lands belonging to Christians...⁶⁶

This statement shows that Innocent was wholly committed to the crusaders' journey to the Holy Land, not Constantinople, and opposed to any venture which would result in further attacks on fellow Christians.

This makes clear that Pope Innocent III had no concealed agenda when he issued the call for Crusade in 1198, nor during its early stages. It is true that his actions following the fall of Constantinople, including acceptance and promotion of the new eastern Latin empire, reveal his desire to subjugate the Orthodox Church of the east to western Catholicism. But this had been a motivation of the papacy for centuries, and was clearly not a factor in his actions prior to 1204. Thus, assigning blame even for the minor mistakes he made during the early years of the Fourth Crusade and in his relations with the Crusaders is fruitless when discussing the diversion, since all evidence points to his wish for the Crusade to head to the Holy Land as rapidly as possible.

Similarly fruitless are attempts to explain the diversion, usually by strong adherents to the writings of Geoffrey de Villehardouin, by assigning blame to those leaders who most closely followed the Crusading ideal. These are typified by Simon de Montfort among the secular leaders, and Abbot Guy of Vaux-de-Cernay among the religious leaders. They refused to attack Zara and left the army there, while others objected strenuously to the diversion of the Crusade to Constantinople sometime later, and also departed. Some even went so far as to reassure the citizens of Zara that they need only hold off the Venetians, since the French would not be party to the attack on the city. Among these were Simon and Guy, as well as Enguerrand and Robert of Boves, all of whom the Venetian Doge Enrico Dandolo then charged with not honoring their

⁶⁶ Gill, 98.

word. Unfortunately, many of the Crusaders *were* amongst those who attacked Zara.⁶⁷

However, Simon and several other leaders would not join them, including the two lords of Boves. “They and their followers therefore encamped at a distance from the city apart from the host.”⁶⁸

These men also acted against the diversion to Constantinople when the young prince Alexius arrived in Zara in late December, 1202, as described in the following passage:

The faction opposed to the proposal to aid young Alexius was led by Simon of Montfort, who saw himself as the staunch defender of papal policy and Catholic morality. Abbot Guy, who was closely attached to the count of Montfort, asserted that those of his party would never consent to the plan, for they had not left home to fall upon Christians but to go to Syria.⁶⁹

The results of their opposition to aiding Alexius were twofold: first, “...only twelve of the chief men would affix their signatures to the conventions.”⁷⁰ Second, it caused further dissention in an already divided army camp, especially amongst the poor. Of the growing feelings of distrust amongst the poor contingent of the crusaders, Queller, Compton and Campbell write:

The poor mistrusted the Venetians and their own leaders, who, they were coming to believe, were more interested in material gain than in the holy cause...Under pressure the leaders did grant permission for about a thousand to leave the host and find their own way to fulfill their vows...Over a thousand more deserted.”⁷¹

Simon de Montfort himself, along with his brother Guy, and a large party that possibly included Enguerrand of Boves, “...made their way with great suffering by land up the coast of the Adriatic to Italy. In Apulia Simon hired ships to take his men to Syria.”⁷² With dedication and honor leading several men to such actions, it may be concluded that such Crusading leaders, both military and religious, are free from responsibility at Zara, as well as for the sacking of

⁶⁷ Queller et al, ‘The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority’, 450-451.

⁶⁸ Queller et al, ‘The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority’, 451.

⁶⁹ Queller et al, ‘The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority’, 452.

⁷⁰ Queller et al, ‘The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority’, 452.

⁷¹ Queller et al, ‘The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority’, 452.

⁷² Queller et al, ‘The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority’, 453.

Constantinople in 1204. They had no ulterior motive for taking the Cross, nor did their motives change following the attack on Zara, and they actively opposed the diversion to Constantinople.

Among other Crusading leaders, both secular and religious, those typified by Simon and Guy are not alone in this. Some are considered to be guilty mainly due to the state of affairs in Venice when they congregated there in the early summer of 1202. As described earlier, one result of the severe shortage of the estimated number of men was that the Crusaders found themselves unable to meet the terms of the treaty for their transportation that they had signed with the Venetians.⁷³ This lends creditability to the idea that those nobles who had pledged to meet at Venice, and who then had departed from other ports, such as Apulia, were responsible for the failure of the Crusade from its very beginning. Among such crusaders were Vilain of Nully, Henry of Arzillieres, and Renaud of Dampierre. Even Count Louis of Blois, who had much to lose by not departing from Venice since he was one of the signatories of the treaty with the Venetians, was hesitant to leave from their city.⁷⁴ There have been several reasons theorized for such nobles not joining in the departure from Venice, including an unwillingness to serve under the Marquis of Montferrat, a knowledge of the intended destination of the departure from Venice being Egypt rather than Syria, as well as the expense involved in the treaty. They preferred instead to part from a port that was economically suitable to them.⁷⁵ Since it was at Venice that the Fourth Crusade first began to unravel, to apply a certain amount of guilt for its failure to such men may be valid. However, they can hardly be blamed for simply choosing alternate ports of departure, and their motives cannot be questioned since they did in fact journey to the Holy Land as they had pledged to do.

⁷³ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 443.

⁷⁴ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 443.

⁷⁵ Queller et al, 'The Fourth Crusade: The Neglected Majority', 444.

To conclude, as stated at the outset of this analysis, historians that seek to either apply culpability to specific individuals or to defend them from the disastrous results of the diversion of the Fourth Crusade are misguided. They overlook the fact that nearly everyone involved was in some way to blame. Even those who avoided the attacks on Zara and Constantinople can be blamed for not arriving in Venice as they had pledged to do, for reasons described above. More importantly, however, recent historians overlook the fact that among key leaders of the Fourth Crusade, there were pre-existing motives to divert the Crusade to Zara and Constantinople. This is especially true of Boniface of Montferrat and the Venetians led by Doge Enrico Dandolo. Animosity regarding the treatment of his brothers at the hands of previous Emperors was clearly a guiding factor in Boniface's choice to support the young Prince Alexius. This in turn was a major motivating factor in his choice to lead his Christian army against one of the largest Christian cities in the world. Similarly, animosity toward the rebellious town of Zara led Doge Enrico Dandolo and his Venetian fleet to convince the Crusaders to divert the Crusade there. After that successful venture, bitterness over Emperor Alexius III's choice to give preferential treatment to their Genoese and Pisan competitors was their motivation to again divert the Crusade to Constantinople.

With such a contention, some might attempt to argue that this essay also falls within the misguided cycle of laying blame by singling out Boniface and Enrico Dandolo's Venetians. While on the surface such an argument would appear to have validity, it is in fact far from the case. While it is true that the above analysis of the pre-existing motives of Boniface and the Venetians does contend that those ulterior intentions were the most primary factor behind the diversion to Constantinople, it does not make any attempt to single them out as entirely culpable for the tragedy of 1204. Indeed, illustration of their motives may even be considered by some to

be forgiving of their actions. They did, after all, have reasons for the actions they perpetrated against Constantinople, unlike many of their fellow Crusaders. Thus, this author would contend that if the current trend of attempting to place culpability entirely on single groups or individuals must continue, perhaps future students of the Fourth Crusade should assign blame to those they feel are most responsible for handing such power to a man and a country that clearly had so much to gain by conquering not the Holy Land, but the capital of the Byzantine Empire.

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